

THE
PASTON LETTERS



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H. B. WITTON,

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THE PASTON LETTERS.

Scenes From English Life During the Wars of the Roses.

(Read by H. B. Witton before the Hamilton Association)

These famous papers comprise the correspondence and documents of the Pastons, a family who lived many years in the county of Norfolk, on the eastern coast of England. The sumptuous edition of this work, edited by Gairdner and published in Arber's annotated reprints, contains altogether 1,086 Paston letters and papers. They were written between the years 1419 and 1506, one of the stormiest periods of English history. During the intervening 86 years, from the first to the last of these letters, some of the most striking events in the life of the English nation took place. England had five sovereigns during these years. Henry V. ruled three years, a third of his whole reign. Henry VI. was king 39 years and Edward VI. 22 years. Then followed the mere shadow of a reign of Edward V., who was murdered in the tower, and the two years' reign of Richard III., and then 20 of the 24 years during which Henry VII. was king of England.

The wars of the Roses—the struggle between the white rose of York and the red rose of Lancaster—for the English crown, were waged at intervals for nearly half the eighty-six years covered by the Paston letters. Comines, the French chronicler of the times, says the calamities of these wars were chiefly confined to the soldiers who fought in them, and that the campaigns were of short duration, so that including the fourteen or fifteen engagements of the whole struggle, the time of actual warfare was not more than two years. Be that as it may, the strife was a deadly one. In it Englishmen caused each other's blood to flow like water. Eighty princes of the blood met a violent death, and half the nobility were swept away by fratricidal hands. The headsmen, with his axe and block, was a grim destroyer more to be dreaded than the warrior with his armor. An act of the first parliament under Edward IV. imposed penalties of treason against Henry the deposed king, Margaret the queen, and their son, and against two dukes, ten earls, and no less than one hundred and thirty knights, priests and esquires. Under acts of attainder passed by parliament, it is said that, including the whole period of the wars of the roses, nearly one-fifth of the land of the kingdom was forfeited to the crown.

At the time of these wars, some of the great

English nobles lived in almost regal state. The power behind the throne was becoming as great, or greater, than that on the throne. The name "king-maker," given to the Earl of Warwick, shows the dependent power of the king on that of the subject had, in one case at least become a recognized fact. At the different English mansions of Warwick thirty thousand people were fed daily; and when he was in London so great was the number of retainers and guests at his town house that "six oxen were eaten at a breakfast." He attended parliament with an immense retinue of liveried servants, and it required but a sign for thousands of soldiers to rally under his banner. But these ambitious nobles "builded better than they knew." In smiting each other in their fury they dealt deadly blows at the whole feudal system. This was no small blessing, for the feudalism which augmented the power of the nobles till it menaced the throne, also doomed the toiling masses of Englishmen to be bondmen, almost without hope.

Besides the wars of the nobles, England was also distracted in those times by popular outbreaks. The Kentish uprising, under Cade's leadership, from its proximity to the capital, was the most serious of these revolts. For a time London was in considerable peril, and it took hard fighting to quell the tumult Cade's attack on the city occasioned.

The character of the Paston letters is domestic, not political. Nevertheless they now and again throw vivid gleams of indirect light on what was going on in the great world of politics. Here and there eye-witnesses of, and participants in, famous doings of that age write to members of the Paston family very graphic accounts of what they saw and did. The collection also contains interesting historical papers that chanced to fall into the hands of the Pastons. The thousand letters show more than 200 correspondents of all ranks and conditions of life, kings and queens, priors and friars, nobles and farmers. But most of the letters are between members of the Paston family and relate chiefly to matters of family interest. Their irresistible charm is the intensely realistic picture they give of English life and manners in the fifteenth century.

Before any particular letters of the collection engage our attention, it may be well to learn

something more about the Paston family, and the somewhat strange vicissitudes of their manuscripts, as narrated by Mr. Gairdner in his interesting preface.

Robert Paston, the head of the Paston family, at the time of Charles the Second, was made, by that monarch, Earl of Yarmouth. His son had no male issue and the title became extinct. The second Earl of Yarmouth lacked the thrift of the Pastons, and became so reduced in circumstances that he sold the family papers to Peter Le Neve, a Norfolk antiquary and Norroy king-at-arms. In 1729 Le Neve died, leaving his manuscripts by will to Dr. Tanner, and to Martin—honest Tom Martin—of Palgrave, Suffolk. Soon after Le Neve died, Martin became a widower. In a short time he married Le Neve's widow, with whom he lived nearly 40 years. Through this second marriage he became possessed of a large number of Le Neve's MSS., left in the possession of the widow.

Martin, who was passionately devoted to antiquarian studies, and said he could live contented on bread and water in order to follow them up, died in 1771. His whole collection of antiquarian papers and objects was sold for £630 to a Mr. Worth, a chemist at Diss. Some of the trivial portions of Martin's collection, Worth sold locally; the printed books he sold at Norwich, and some of the MSS. were sold at two auctions in London, in 1773 and 1774. Worth died in 1774. He had not sold the Paston MSS., which were bought from his executors by John Fenn. Fenn arranged his treasured Paston MSS. with great care, and published them, both in the original spelling and in a modernized version; and with facsimiles of the signatures, seals and watermarks of the paper on which they were written. Two volumes were published in 1787, two in 1789, and a posthumous volume was issued in 1823 by his nephew, Sergeant Frere. Of the two volumes first published, the first edition was sold in a week, and was highly praised. Horace Walpole at the time writes: "What antiquary would be answering a letter from a living countess, when he may read one from Eleanor Mowbray, Duchess of Norfolk? To me these letters make all others not worth reading."

The most competent authorities bear testimony to the scrupulous care taken by Fenn in the performance of his work as editor. On the title page Fenn named his book: "Original letters written during the reigns of Henry VI., Edward IV. and Richard III., by persons of rank or consequence, containing many curious anecdotes, elucidating public matters, likewise private manners."

George III. was much interested with the Paston letters, and knighted Fenn early in 1787, the year of their first publication. Gairdner says, on being knighted, Fenn "there and then presented his majesty with three bound volumes of MSS., which were the originals published in his first two volumes." These bound MSS. were last seen in the hands of Queen Charlotte, but they disappeared from the royal library, and although Prince Albert had diligent search made for them shortly before his death, they have never been found.

Strange to say, the original MSS. printed by Fenn in the other three volumes also disappeared.

It was singular that none of the original letters could be found. They had been published at three different times, and extraordinary did it seem for all to be lost that an able critic, Herman Merivale, in the *Fortnightly Review*, made the complete disappearance of the original letters a ground for questioning the authenticity of the entire collection. Fortunately all cause to doubt the genuineness of these papers has been removed. At Dungeness, Cambridgeshire, in the house of Phillip Frere, son of the Sergeant Frere, who published Fenn's fifth volume, the originals of that volume were found in 1865. Ten years later, in 1875, the originals of Fenn's volumes three and four, with 93 additional unpublished letters, were found at Roydon hall, Norfolk, the family seat of the Freres. Mr. Gairdner examined these closely and saw evidences that Fenn had gone over them all, and had copied some of them with his own hand.

The Pastons took their name from the village of Paston, in Norfolk, near the eastern coast, about twenty miles from Norwich. Blomefield, the county historian, accords them an aristocratic pedigree, but another and less flattering genealogist shows that the early Pastons might have truthfully sung, as did Beranger, "*Je suis vilain et tres vilain.*" But whatever their lineage, in the reign of Henry VI. William Paston was justice of the common pleas, and was called the good judge. His son John was brought up to the law, and became executor for Sir John Fastolf, of whom we shall hear much more in the letters. John Paston married Margaret, daughter and heiress of John Mauteby, of Mauteby of Norfolk. Her letters, both in number and importance, take first rank in the collection. Margaret Paston was the mother of several children. The eldest of these and the next son were both named John, and in turn both were knighted. After them came William Paston, who was a lawyer. He had two sons, and one of his daughters was married to Thos. Manners, first Earl of Rutland. His second son, Clement, was a brave soldier, and was perhaps the most celebrated member of this great family. He served his country by sea and land during a long life. An old county chronicle says "he was called by Henry VIII. his champion; by the protector Somerset his soldier; by Queen Mary her seaman, and by Elizabeth her father." He died childless, and was succeeded by his nephew. The line descended through Christopher, Sir Edmund and Sir Wm. Paston to the Robert Paston already mentioned, who was made Earl of Yarmouth by Charles II.

There is no intention to present in this paper a summary of the Paston letters. They must be read leisurely and in their original orthography, for their quaintness and worth to be appreciated. If, however, we turn over the leaves of Mr. Gairdner's three volumes, and read, though in the most unmethodic manner here and there a passage, it cannot fail to bring up pleasant reminiscences for such as have already feasted at his table, and may

whet the appetite of some who by mischance are unaware of the literary dainties within their reach.

Turning to the time of the first of these letters, it will be found the success of the English under Henry V. in France continued to cause exultation in England. Agincourt was rejoiced over as the most glorious achievement of English arms. The first paper in the Paston collection details how Henry V. in his second campaign in France caused 5 cities, 31 towns, 6 abbeys, and 81 castles to surrender to his prowess. But these conquests in France soon turned to defeats in the following reign. Henry VI. was always feeble and irresolute, but the ambitious projects which oppressed and finally destroyed him were plotted near the throne to which he succeeded when only 9 years old, long before he reached years of responsibility. The long years of his minority and the reverses to the English arms in France, were rich ground for the seeds of civil strife to grow in.

The three ministers of the young king, who stand out in bolder relief than the rest, are the Duke of Gloucester, the king's uncle, one of the regents to the crown, Henry Beauport, afterwards Cardinal, and Wm. de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk. It was Suffolk who arranged the marriage of the king with Margaret of Anjou. He received marked distinction for his services, being made first marquis, then duke. Shakespeare, who has made the chief personages of Henry VI. reign realities to live forever, contrasts the villainy of Suffolk and Beaufort with the good qualities of the Duke of Gloucester. But while Shakespeare follows the chroniclers in the main, we must not forget that he has the license of a poet, and that when it suits him he uses it. In the battle of Wakefield he makes Richard a hero in the fray. His father, the Duke of York, says after the fight :

"Three times did Richard make a lane to me,
And three times cried, 'Courage, father, fight
it out.'"

But we know that the battle of Wakefield was fought in 1460, and that Richard was born in 1452, so he could not have borne arms at that time, as he was not then 9 years old.

The charges against Suffolk by his adverse contemporaries, it is to be feared, make him as hideous as the poet pictures him. The Paston papers contain a full copy of his impeachment. It is a most formidable document. He is charged with treason against the king by causing his son to be married to "Margaret, daughter of the late Duke of Somerset, presuming and pretending her to be the next inheritable to the crown of this your realm." It also charges that he was bribed to deliver up Anjou and Maine, and that he had disclosed the secrets of the council chamber to the ambassador of the French king. The king exonerated Suffolk from the charge of treason in the count containing the marriage story. On the other charges he had to leave England for five years.

Gairdner points out that Suffolk could not have been guilty of traitorously causing his son to marry. The indictment was made

Feb. 7, 1450, and Suffolk's son was not born till Sept. 27, 1442, and was therefore not 8 years old at the time. It might also be argued that as the paramount duties of an English statesman in that time were to strengthen the weakness of an irresolute king, and to maintain the French conquests of the previous reign, that the duke in securing for his royal master the hand of a queen as closely allied to France, and as resolute as Margaret was, deserved praise for his statesmanship, not punishment for treason. Suffolk was ordered to leave England by May 1, within three months of the date of the indictment. The Paston papers have preserved a letter he addressed, before leaving, to his son. As it is a remarkable letter it may be worth while to give it in full :

"My dear and only well-beloved son—I beseech our Lord in heaven, the Maker of all the world, to bless you, and to send you ever grace to love Him and to dread Him ; to the which, as far as a father may charge his child, I both charge you and pray you to set all your spirits and wits to do and to know His holy laws and commandments, by the which ye shall, with His great mercy, pass all the great tempests and troubles of this wretched world. And that also, wittingly, ye do nothing for love nor dread of any earthly creature that should displease Him. And there, as any frailty maketh you to fall, beseech His mercy soon to call you to Him again with repentance, satisfaction, and contrition of your heart, nevermore in will to offend him.

"Secondly. Next Him, above all earthly things, to be true liegeman in heart, in will, in thought, in deed, unto the king our aelder most high and dread Sovereign Lord, to whom both ye and I be so much bound to ; charging you, as father can and may, rather to die than to be the contrary, or to know anything that were against the welfare or prosperity of his most royal person, but that as far as your body and life may extend ye live and die to defend it, and to let his highness have knowledge thereof in all the haste ye can.

"Thirdly, in the same wise, I charge you, my dear son, always, as ye be bounden by the commandment of God to do, to love, to worship your lady and mother, and also that ye obey always her commandments, and to believe her counsels and advices in all your works, the which dread not shall be best and truest to you. And if any other body would stir you to the contrary, to flee the counsel in any wise, for ye shall find it nought and evil.

"Furthermore, as far as father may and can I charge you in any wise to flee the company and counsel of proud men, of covetous men, and of flattering men, the more especially and mightily to withstand them, and not to draw, nor to meddle with them, with all your might and power. And to draw to you and to your company good and virtuous men, and such as be of good conversation, and of truth, and by them shall ye never be deceived, nor repent you of. Moreover, never follow your own wit in no wise, but in all your works of such folks as I write of above ask your advice and counsel ; and doing thus, with the mercy of God, ye shall do right well, and live in right much

worship, and great heart-rest and ease. And I will be to you as good lord and father as my heart can think.

"And last of all, as heartily and as lovingly as ever father blessed his child on earth, I give you the blessing of our Lord and me, which of His infinite mercy increase you in all virtue and good living. And that your blood may by His grace from kindred to kindred multiply in this earth to his service, in such wise that after departing from this wretched world here, ye and they may glorify Him eternally amongst His angels in heaven.

"Written of my hand

"The day of my departing fro this land.

"Your true and loving father,

"SUFFOLK."

Gairdner suggests that as an evidence of piety to God and loyalty to the king this letter will, likely, with most readers, counter-balance the charges against the purity of Suffolk's intentions. It is certainly a most beautiful letter, and compels sympathy for the writer in spite of the feeling against him we imbibe from Shakespeare and the historians.

A letter dated six days after that of the duke to his son is given from Wm. Lomner to John Paston describing Suffolk's tragic death. His vessel was captured in the Channel and he was taken on board a ship called Nicholas of the Tower, whose master bade him "Welcome, traitor." After some time he was taken from the ship to a boat in which was "an axe and a block, and one of the lewdest of the ship bade him lay down his head and he should be fair dealt with and die on a sword; and took a rusty sword and smote off his head with half a dozen strokes, and took away his gown of russet, and his doublet of velvet mailed, and laid his body on the sands of Dover; and some say his head was set on a pole by it. And the sheriff of Kent doth watch the body and sent his under-sheriff to the judges to wot what to do, and also to the king what shall be done."

There is about this date a letter from Margaret Paston to her husband, telling him she hears that the Duke of Suffolk has been reinstated in the king's favor. She also complains "that there have been many of the enemy against Yarmouth and Cromer, and have done much harm; and the said enemies be so bold that they come up to the land and play them on Caister sands and in other places as homely as they were English men." Margaret Paston's letters are nearly always pleasant to read; and she writes a tenth of the whole collection. More than half her epistles are to her husband, letting him know what happens during his absence from home, or asking his advice about something to be done. The rest are to her two oldest sons. She has the rare faculty of so clearly describing whatever she writes about, that one sees it as a picture.

The uprising of the "Commons of Kent" under Cade's captaincy, took place at Whitsuntide of the same month in which Suffolk was murdered. The excitement following his murder likely somewhat precipitated that revolt. The "complaint of the commons" was, that the elections in Kent for knights of the shire were not free; that the king's lands in

France were alienated by traitorous and corrupt ministers who should be dismissed, and that the "statute of laborers" should be repealed. The last named was by no means the lightest grievance in the "complaint." The working masons who built the churches, abbeys and castles of the country had long been wont to hold yearly chapters and congregations. A few years before Cade's outbreak, an act passed parliament forbidding such gatherings, because they were contrary to the "statute of laborers," and providing "that they that cause such assemblies to be made, shall be judged as felons, and such as so assemble shall be punished by imprisonment of their bodies, and make fine and ransom at the king's will."

The "statute of laborers" these assemblies ran counter to compelled every man or woman, free or bond, within the age of threescore years who had no land of his own nor means to live and was not serving any other to serve the employer who shall require him to do so and only to take the wages which were accustomed to be taken in that neighborhood, two years before the plague." The penalty for the transgression of this statute was imprisonment.

The council refused to receive from the commons their "complaint." The result was severe fighting, Cade's occupation of London, cruelties and pillage without stint, and an exhibition of the characteristic timidity of the king. Lord Say and his son-in-law, the sheriff of Kent, were massacred at Cade's instance. But his cruelty was soon meted back to himself, for his force was routed, he was captured and beheaded, and after the barbarous laws of the time his body was drawn through the streets and then quartered and sent to towns wide apart. His head, with the face turned toward Kent, was impaled on London bridge, which Gairdner says "had during the year bore 23 such horrid ornaments."

What delight Shakespeare takes in portraying Cade's character! He gives him the merit of brute courage and has made him the most inimitable demagogue in literature. How adroitly he carries out his ends and keeps his following intact by playing on their passions and prejudices. He, their captain, "is brave and vows reformation. There shall be seven half-penny loaves for a penny and he will make it a felony to drink small beer." "Dost thou use to write thy name or hast thou a mark to thyself like an honest, plain dealing man?" he asks the clerk of Chatham, and thereby seals the doom of his victim. How fully he justifies his designs against Say by charging him with having "traitorously corrupted the youth of this realm by erecting a grammar school" and by the culminating charge against him: "and more than that he can speak French, and therefore he is a traitor." Shakespeare pictures him as a cajoler, and having made us laugh at his nimble wit, concedes him no higher merit—neither patriotism nor humane feeling—but brands him as a trickster who is as cruel as he is cunning.

One of the Paston letters gives a minute description of Cade's encampment on Blackheath. It was written some time after the revolt by one Payn, of Sir John Fastolf's house-

hold, to John Paston. Sir John was dead, and from Paston, who was one of the executors for the Fastolf estate, Payn claimed indemnity for his losses in the rebellion, giving particulars as to what these were, and how they were incurred. He was, he says, ordered by Sir John to take with him a mounted servant and proceed on horseback to Cade's camp to find out what the commons wanted, and to spy out their strength. He sent the servant back with the horses, gaining entrance to the camp on the plea that his wife's brothers, who were there, had sent for him. But somebody recognized him as one of Fastolf's men, when he was seized and proclaimed by a herald, at four parts of the camp, as a spy, and was led before the captain, where an axe and block were brought to behead him. At the last moment Paston's brother-in-law, who was with Cade and had much influence, appealed to Cade on his behalf and saved him on condition that he swore fealty to them. Afterwards he was permitted to go home for his armor and was then to return to the camp. He took the news to Fastolf, who had fortified his house and manned it with old soldiers from the wars in Normandy. The old knight, Payn further says, at his suggestion put his soldiers away, made no show of resistance, fearing if he did Cade would burn the house, and then withdrew to the Tower for safety. Payn and another servant were left in the house, and when the "Commons of Kent" came, by a judicious distribution of meat and drink, for which he made outlay of nearly £4 of his own money, he saved his master's house from being burnt. The captain sent certain men to his rooms to plunder his chests, and at the White Hart, Southwark, the captain bade one Lovelace despoil him of his apparel. The house of his wife, who with his five children lived in the county, was also sacked; and for all these his losses, in defense of Fastolf's property, he asked indemnity from the knight's executors. Four pounds, at first sight, looks a small sum with which—even when turned into bread and sack—to mollify the destructive designs of a following like Cade's. Competent authorities, however, estimate the purchasing power of money to have been fifteen times more in those days than it is in ours, which brings Payn's outlay of his personal money to an equality with nearly \$300 of our current money, not so mean a sum for his purpose as his £4 look at first.

A central figure amongst the many personages of the past, these letters make live again, is Sir John Fastolf. He was a noted soldier in the wars with France, and fought under Henry V. at Agincourt, and at the siege of Rouen. He afterwards served in France under the Duke of Bedford and many distinctions were conferred upon him. Shakespeare imputes cowardice to him, and to sustain his charge has at his back the statement of the annalist, Holingshed, who says Sir John left the battle of Patay without striking a blow, and that Bedford "for doubt of misdealing at this brunt, took from him the image of St. George and his Garter, though afterwards the same were to him again delivered against the mind of Lord Talbot." The French chronicles

make no mention of this, nor does Caxton, the first English printer, who says Fastolf "signified his military abilities in France for 40 years."

After the conquests in France, Fastolf returned to England, became a member of the privy council, and, after he was 70 years old, built an imposing castle at Caister, in Norfolk, his native place. The building of a fortified place near the mouth of the river Yare, was a cherished project of Sir John's. His family had long held the manor of Caister, and Henry V. gave him license to build a castle there, as strong as himself "could devise." The structure he built was of brick. It had embattled towers and the foundations are said to have enclosed six acres. A moat which surrounded it led to a navigable creek by which the six vessels for which he had a license from the crown could reach the sea. The ruins of Fastolf's castle still remain. The Paston collection contains more than 60 of Fastolf's letters, besides a number from William Worcester, or Botoner—his mother's maiden name, by which he often called himself—the scholarly secretary to Sir John. In addition to the letters, we have also given us a curious statement of Sir John's claims on the crown for special services, his will—or wills—for he had three drawn up before the disposal of his earthly goods pleased him, and a complete inventory of what his castle contained at his death, which took place in his eighty-second year. Besides the public rooms, halls, offices and chapels, the inventory enumerates 26 chambers. It conveys a good idea of what constituted the equipment of a castle and the armor and apparel of a knight in the middle of the fifteenth century, the time of Fastolf's death.

Sir John, from all we learn of him, was a self-asserting, irascible man, who, dealing somewhat penuriously and harshly with his servants and dependents, sought to solace his conscience and compound his faults with heaven by making costly additions to religious edifices; by founding a college of seven priests to say mass for his soul, and by endowing an hospital for seven poor men. One of his servants says: "Cruel and vengeable he hath ever been, and for the most part without pity and mercy." To his friend the parson of Castellcombe, Sir Thomas Howes, he writes, inquiring whether certain persons who had been his enemies continue still in their wilfulness, instructing him to tell, on his behalf, some who had dared to be so hardy as to kick against his rights, that they should be requited as far as law and reason permitted, and if they would not dread nor obey that then they should be requited "by Blackbeard or Whitebeard, that is to say, by God or devil."

His faithful and most capable secretary, Fastolf treated like an ordinary servant of his household; and although Worcester—who was as Mr. Gairdner shows, the most loyal of secretaries—had vindicated the French policy and campaigns of his master, all that Sir John did for him specially was to express a wish that he had been a priest so that "a living by reason of a benefice" could have been given to him. No wonder Worcester, who wrote thus to Paston, should add "may our Lord bring my

master in a better mood for others as for me." Once when his friend Henry Windsor hinted to Worcester that he was extravagant in buying divers books from a Lombard, who was teaching him French, the secretary excused his prodigality by explaining that he had the same passionate regard for a good "boke of French or of poetre as my maistre Fastolf would have to purchase a fair manoir." After Fastolf died Worcester wrote a book of annals, which remains one of the most important histories of his times.

But this testy old soldier had his virtues if he had his faults; and we must "forbear to judge for we are sinners all." One is disposed to think kindly of him, too, for being the actual knight who suggested to Shakespeare his Falstaff, that unique combination of wit, impetuosity and folly, who has caused more laughter in the world than any of the numberless characters that sprang from the great poet's fertile imagination. If Falstaff be the lineal imaginative descendant of Fastolf, assuredly the poet transposed the character more than he did the name. One document alone in the Paston papers proves this. The real Fastolf on one occasion lent the Duke of York £437, taking diamonds and jewelry in pledge for payment, a transaction of which the Shakespearean knight would never have been guilty. But we know the motif in a work of art leaves the artist much liberty for details; and had not Charles Dickens reluctantly to confess that Leigh Hunt and his own father were respectively the prototypes of Horace Skimpool and Micawber?

Fastolf died Nov. 5, 1459. Towards the close of his life his dominant desire had been to establish in his castle at Caister a band of six monks and a prior, to pray for the souls of his relations and for his own soul; and to arrange an asylum for seven poor men. His will expressed this desire; and to give it effect, he appointed Parson Howes and John Paston executors, with power, if they choose, to confer with eight other executors, who had no authority unless they were asked to assist. Provided John Paston paid to the estate the sum of 4,000 marks, and founded the religious house and home for the poor in accordance with the will, the testator bequeathed to Paston his Caister property—four manors he had held—and the whole of the lands he had owned in Norfolk and Suffolk. Soon after Fastolf died, Paston became one of the representatives of the county of Norfolk in parliament. He was elected in the interest of the Duke of York. There is a letter to the newly elected member from Friar Brackley, which shows the latter to have been a zealous political supporter as well as a warm personal friend. He assures Paston, who is in London: "You have many good prayers, what of the religious houses, the city and country. May God save our good Lord Warwick and his brethren, and preserve them from treason and poison; for if aught comes to my Lord Warwick but good, farewell ye, farewell I, and all our friends! for by the worth of my soul this land were utterly undone, which God forbid."

Paston's increased importance soon brought its more than proportionate increase of trouble. His powerful neighbors, the Dukes of Norfolk

and Suffolk, like Ahab on Naboth's vineyard, soon cast longing looks toward his newly acquired possessions, and both persistently sought by law and force to despoil him of some portion of them, to their own advantage. Another danger also jeopardized his ownership of Caister castle. Edward IV. had married privately Elizabeth Woodville in 1464, three months after he was proclaimed king. That marriage estranged Warwick and others of the old nobility, and to make up the loss of their support, Edward sought to enrich and make powerful the relations of his wife. Lord Scyles, the queen's brother, had already thrown envious eyes on Caister castle, and somebody at court—Gairdner thinks Justice Yelverton, a non-acting executor with Paston for Fastolf—whispered in the ear of the king that Paston was of servile birth, virtually a bondman to the crown; that his claim to these rich manors in Norfolk and Suffolk was consequently invalid, and he might therefore be dispossessed of them without injustice.

After the accession of Edward IV. many estates were confiscated, and though the king turned a deaf ear to Yelverton's suggestion, Paston was by no means out of danger. For some reasons, he had more than once failed to obey summonses given under the privy seal, and a friend kindly warns him of ominous threats from the king that another instance of such disobedience might cost him his head. But the king was not unfriendly to John Paston, and sanctioned an agreement for the foundation of the college at Caister. It was likely at the king's instance the Duke of Norfolk temporarily withdrew from Caister. Paston, on his side, gave up to the king the jewels that the Duke of York had pledged to Fastolf.

But with all the good-will of the king, the times were big with trouble, and brought forth for Paston his full share. In Norfolk local riots, sometimes attended with loss of life, were of frequent occurrence. Once or twice he narrowly escaped grave personal injury, and his continuous litigation caused him temporary imprisonment three times. It was during that period that most of the remarkable letters of his wife, Margaret Paston, were written to him. In his absence she arranged everything pertaining to the estate: leases, rents, wages, tenants, workmen, crops; all that concerned these and much more she reported to her husband. It was almost impossible for Paston's enemies to take a step against him without her knowledge, and she added many a shrewd suggestion as to how their ends could be thwarted. Incidentally her letters give the then current prices of most commodities, and they are rightly prized as the best annals of English country life of that time. They must be read at leisure to be fully appreciated.

Paston made a brave fight, and held his own well against powerful odds; but at length his physical powers gave way, and he died in 1466, hardly six years and six months after Fastolf, and before he had established, beyond doubt, the rightfulness of his claim to the Fastolf estate. One wonders if John Paston, in those litigious years, did not often think of these

words his mother wrote him in his youth: "I advise you to think once of the day of your father's counsel to learn the law, for he did many times that whosoever should dwell at Paston should have need to con to defend himself."

After John Paston's death his eldest son established beyond cavil that his family were lords of the soil, holding title deeds in the time of Henry the III.; but he was not so successful in at once silencing the questions raised against Fastolf's will. The letters leave no doubt that it was Fastolf's intention to found at Caister castle a home for seven priests, and one for seven indigent men. But whether the nuncupative will sought to be established, written in the third person, and affecting to affirm the orally expressed wishes of a testator 82 years old, too weak to sign his name or to speak but in low whispers, really expressed the will of that testator might be difficult to judge then and is impossible to know now. Besides being made under such circumstances, in the Paston version of Fastolf's will one of the witnesses was the chief beneficiary; and a second witness, Parson Thomas Howes, a Grey friar, shortly before his death, "for the relief of his conscience," said the will was not what it should have been. On the other hand, the letters show that as Fastolf grew old his regard for Paston strengthened, and that he became anxious above all things to have Paston near him, when he thought he had not long to live.

The testimony of Dr. Brackley, the Grey friar who attended Fastolf in his last illness, is not without weight. On his deathbed Brackley was shrien by Friar Mowth, who said his conduct regarding Fastolf's will was looked on with some suspicion, when he solemnly affirmed his conviction of Paston's integrity, saying: "I desire that you will report after my death that I took it upon my soul at my dying that that will that John Paston put in to be proved was Sir John Fastolf's will." Several of Brackley's letters are preserved in the Paston papers; there is also one of his sermons, for he was a notable preacher in his day. He wrote vigorous English, which by contrast is all the more forcible and quaint from the numerous Latin quotations and additions he added to everything he wrote.

The eldest son of John Paston was knighted, and was much at court. He adhered persistently to the contestations of his father, and, more successful than his father had been, he eventually obtained a decision from the Archbishop of Canterbury confirming his right to the manor of Caister. Worcester wrote to the widow of John Paston expressing regret that any third party had caused misunderstandings between her late husband and himself, and congratulating her that she would at length occupy the great house built by his old master. But the victory was not final. The displeasure of Warwick against the king grew stronger and, with his connivance, there once more was open revolt in the north. The confusion of the times gave the Duke of Norfolk his opportunity, and he besieged Caister castle in August, 1469, a few days after the king had become a temporary

prisoner in the hands of his own subject, Warwick. On the 26th of the following month the little garrison had to surrender; and the great castle which Fastolf had willed Paston to found a college in, and which he desired should be razed to the ground rather than any of the great nobles should conquer, had fallen into the hands of the most powerful duke in eastern England.

But the contest for the ownership of Fastolf's castle was not ended yet. The king had not prevented the aggression of the Duke of Norfolk at Caister, and Sir John's zeal for his majesty was on the wane. At the same time he entered into friendly relations with the Earl of Oxford, an ardent Lancastrian who favored the restoration of Henry VI., and both he and his brother John fought under Oxford against Edward at the battle of Barnet. Sir John was wounded there in the arm by an arrow. One of John Paston's letters informs his mother of her eldest son's hurt and adds, "advise my cousin Lymner to be well ware of his dealings and language as yet, for the world I assure you is right queasy." The Duke of Norfolk appears to have evacuated Caister castle during the short period of the restoration of Henry VI., but took it again soon after Edward returned to the throne.

Meanwhile to carry out Fastolf's wishes respecting the college of priests, so far as he could, Sir John Paston agreed with Bishop Waynflete, to give up to Magdalen college, Oxford, all the manors left to John Paston, except Caister and some minor property, which he was to recover from the Duke of Norfolk if he could. Application was made to the Pope and a dispensation was granted sanctioning their agreement. Edward IV. pardoned the Pastons within a year of the time they took up arms against him, and he was not opposed to their recovery of Caister castle. The duke, however, turned a deaf ear to all of Paston's friends, and held possession of the castle till his death in January, 1476. In the next May, seven years after the castle had been taken by force, the king's council, lords, judges and sergeants pronounced the Pastons' title good, and seals were made out for the officers of the Duchesse of Norfolk to give up possession to Sir John Paston.

The later letters of the Paston collection are as attractive as those of the first volume. The interest of the reader does not flag, but is quickened, as he reads of the care of John Paston's widow for her children, and how they marry and are given in marriage. Preliminary match-making, in all respectable society, was, in those days conducted by parents and guardians with formalities now confined to royalty, and woe befel the unhappy wight whose love match dared to overstep them. Such matches were then looked at as much askance as morganatic marriages are now. Even good-natured Sir John Paston, who, as head of the house, was mainly taken infinite pains to find his brother John a wife worthy to share the dignity of the Paston family, became peevish when his brother without his intervention sought the hand of Margery Brews, and ill-naturedly wrote: "This matter is driven thus far without my counsel,

I pray you make an end without my counsel. If it be well I would be glad, if it be otherwise it is pitie. I pray you trouble me no more in this matter."

Sir John Paston never married, though he had an engagement which lasted some years, with a kinswoman of the queen. The tie was difficult to unloose, though for some time it was irksome to both, and was at last broken. Brave a good natured, his presence was welcome at court, and he had, as the letters show, a host of distinguished friends. He cherished some regard for learning, as there is an account of a scribe who for some time was kept working for him. There is also a list of books, which, beyond doubt, were his, on chivalry and romance. One of these volumes is worth special mention. It was entitled "a boke in preente of the Pleye of the Chess," a work printed by William Caxton. That old book is prized now, and will be priceless in the times to come, for it is believed to be the first volume printed in England. It bears the date of March, 1474. Sir John would have liked to possess the books Sir James Gloys left at his death, for Sir James was a learned man and the favorite priest of Sir John's mother. But at first he could not pay for them, and when the choicest were taken, and he could have had the remainder for twenty shillings and six pence he was so intent on matters of war, and law, that he wrote his mother to retain them, saying "my mind is now not most upon books." The price named for the remnant of the good priest's library looks small. Still we know books at that time were held in high esteem. Even Louis XI. could not borrow a book from the faculty of medicine at Paris, without first depositing valuable plate as security.

Sir John Paston lacked the resolute will and thrift of his father, and spent money with an open hand. His extravagance forced him to mortgage a part of his patrimony, and drove his mother to have timber felled, and in other ways to so impoverish the estate, till she said, "it is death for me to think upon it." But with all his defects of character, he compels regard, and one hurries through the letters to find what will befall him next. He was with the king's army at the concluding of the peace of Pequigny, where crafty Louis XI. did with French gold what he feared to attempt with French arms. Reserving his soldiers to fight his own fractious nobles, pretending to pay tribute to a suzerain, he bribed an English army not to fight, and made the English king his pensioner. Sir John Paston suffered from ill-health for many months and died in 1476, seven years before the death of his mother.

Margaret Paston possessed strong common sense, and was fervently religious. There is hardly a letter from her in these volumes but bears witness to the truth of this. In the depths of her sorrow she sought consolation at the shrine of our Lady of Walsingham, or be-

fore the Rood of Bromholme, at the priory, in which she buried her husband. As she advanced in years she obtained from the Bishop of Norwich a license to have the sacrament in her own chapel. When one of the younger sons expressed a wish to become a priest she besought him to take no orders that were binding till he was four and twenty, that she might be sure his knowledge and character would comport with her own high ideal of a priest, adding: "I will love him better to be a good secular man than to be a lewd priest."

The language of these letters is so direct and forcible, and is withal so elastic, that reading them for the first time rarely fails to give a pleasant surprise. At first there is some little difficulty with the spelling of the period, but that is readily mastered. The orthography in which these epistles were written gives them a peculiar quaintness. Indeed, half their charm is gone when they are put into a modern garb. They contain but little sentiment, for they were not written in very sentimental times. In those days, we are told, young ladies of good family, and not of very tender years either, were chastised daily, and sometimes twice in one day; and when a suitor presented himself the question of first importance was, are his lands clear of mortgages? What little humor they display is patchy, and unseemly, of a coarse texture, and out of keeping with the rest.

Traced in sequence the lives of half a dozen men of 63 lead back to the age of the Pastons. The intervening time is short, but change speeds on at such an accelerated pace that there is a great gulf betwixt us. Since their day the forces of nature have been pressed into service, and have raised the standard of human comfort to a level unknown to them. And should it be asked if man can live on bread alone, the answer is that though the shrine of our Lady of Walsingham and the Rood of Bromholme have disappeared, the faith and hope they symbolized still live, and the love of truth and devotion to duty they nurtured remain engrafted in the national character still. The genuine optimist will complacently tell all this and much more to the credit of the nineteenth century. Still the idols of one generation are generally found, by that which follows, to have feet of clay, and the stronger light of the future may show the doings of this century to be a tangled skein of good and evil, much like those of the centuries which preceded it. True it is, that the evils of our own days stand out in a clear medium sharply defined, while many a deformity seen through the mellow light of four past centuries is barely visible. Admitting all this, would it be a vain wish to hope that, when the antiquarian of the future unearths the letters of our day, the men and women of our times, for bravery, honor and devotion, may be found wort^h to rank with our friends the Pastons.

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